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RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000225

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FOR U/S BURNS, ALSO NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS;

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [KHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: GREEK PATRIARCH: RECOGNITION, BEIT SAHOUR HOME
DEMOLITIONS

REF: A. JERUSALEM 3915 (2005)
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 0215

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a February 1 meeting, the Consul General and Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, discussed the Greek Orthodox Church's role in inter-faith dialogue. Theophilos requested USG assistance to obtain Israeli recognition of him as Patriarch and to prevent the demolition of 41 homes in Beit Sahour, some of which are on land owned by the Patriarchite (see ref B regarding the Beit Sahour issue). End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Consul General met with Theophilos III, the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem on February 1. Theophilos, who has still not been recognized by the GOI as the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church despite his election to the position in August 2005, asked for USG assistance in gaining formal recognition from the GOI. He indicated that he believes the GOI is withholding recognition of him and continuing to recognize former Patriarch Irineos in order to pressure the Patriarchite to conclude certain land deals. He said associates of PM Olmert have a vested interest in these deals, but he will not allow the Patriarchite to be treated as a "real estate agency." He insisted "it must be respected." Theophilos noted that the Israeli police presence that protects Irineos while he remains in the Patriarch's apartment is a provocation. Theophilos added that many of his constituents who are Palestinians want to politicize this issue and use it as a tool to criticize the GOI. He said he does not want such a confrontation, but he wants the GOI to recognize him, and he believes quiet USG intervention on his behalf would be useful.

[1](#)3. (C) Theophilos also described problems with Ateret HaCohanim, a right-wing Israel organization pursuing properties in the Old City. The patriarch said the group had attempted to implicate him in questionable activities by depositing money in Patriarchite bank accounts. He described another instance where his car was blocked by a car with members of Ateret HaCohanim. When he exited his vehicle, group leader Dan Matti approached Theophilos in order to have the two photographed together.

[1](#)4. (C) Theophilos also requested USG assistance regarding possible home demolitions in Beit Sahour. He said there are demolition orders for 41 homes, including three structures that are part of a Greek Orthodox housing project on church-owned land. Theophilos noted that the USG had

successfully intervened on behalf of the church and the predominantly Christian Beit Sahour community in 2002 when similar demolition orders were issued. He said that in most cases he has found the IDF responsive to his community's concerns, but in this case, the IDF has said security requires the demolition of these homes. The Consul General told Theophilos that the Consulate is in touch with the mayor of Beit Sahour and was also contacted by the Greek Consul General.

WALLES